

1999 Session of the Indiana General Assembly

State budget provides tax cuts, funding for education

I coauthored the new state budget which will make a very real difference in the lives of many Hoosiers. Some of the highlights include:

Program Funding

- Public education: Statewide total formula funding increase of an average of 4.7 percent in calendar years 2000 and 2001, with minimum guarantees of funding increases of at least 2.5%. Funding was increased for both at-risk and academic honors programs. Local schools and libraries also received \$76 million in technology funding.
- CHOICE: \$5 million increase per year in funding for home health care for the elderly
- Higher education: appropriations were increased by 7.0 percent in fiscal year 2000 and 4.7 percent in 2001
- Vocational education: incentives for school corporations to provide programs in which high employment demand exists
- A new \$50 million 21st Century Research and Technology Fund that will promote high-tech industries located in Indiana
- Social services: Funding for the seriously mentally ill is increased by \$3 million in 2000 and \$6 million in 2001. MRDD programs will receive \$39 million in funding.

Hoosiers will save \$672 million over the next two years in tax cuts

- Property tax cuts: Elimination of county welfare fund and county welfare administration funds from local property taxes (two-year savings: \$67.6 million)
- Inventory tax cuts: Elimination of inventory tax for 87 percent of farms and businesses (two-year savings: \$129.6 million)
- Homeowners: a new income tax deduction for property taxes up to \$2500
- Senior citizens: an increase in the income tax deduction from \$1000 to \$1500 and an increase in the property tax deduction for seniors from \$1000 to \$2000
- Dependent children: an increase in the income tax deduction from \$1000 to \$2500
- Small businesses and farmers: property tax “add-back” repealed so farmers and business owners can deduct the amount of their property taxes from their state income taxes
- Renters: increased the income tax deduction from \$1500 to \$2000
- Mobile homes & campers: eliminated property taxes on mobile homes and campers valued up to \$37,500
- Long-term care health insurance: an income tax deduction for the premiums paid for long-term health care insurance

Funds appropriated for spinal cord research, proton therapy

Spinal Cord Research

I am happy to report that funding was obtained for the Spinal Cord and Head Injury Council established last year in House Bill 1244. \$500,000 was appropriated to both Indiana University and Purdue University to continue researching spinal cord and head injury causes and cures.

I am proud such an important council was established and I am thoroughly pleased that the council’s work in this area will be fully funded. Spinal cord and head injury research is very important and I am glad that the state of Indiana is working hard to find a cure for these medical conditions.

Proton Therapy

I am also pleased to report that Proton therapy treatment is now available in the state of Indiana. This revolutionary treatment for cancer was only available before in Loma Linda, California and Massachusetts General Hospital on the campus of Harvard University in Boston, Massachusetts.

This form of treatment is used in conjunction with radiation. Proton therapy uses a cyclotron generator to pinpoint tumors that need treatment and not harm surrounding organs. This is done by harnessing a beam created by the cyclotron generator on the campus of Indiana University in Bloomington. Indiana University has been experimenting with the cyclotron generator for many years and with the \$10 million appropriated for the proton therapy project this form of cancer treatment should help many Indiana residents in their fight against cancer.

I am happy the proton therapy project was fully funded. The state of Indiana is extremely lucky to have this type of cancer treatment readily available for the residents of southern Indiana.

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Education

ISTEP Gateway Examination -- House Enrolled Act 1050 allows students who do not pass the ISTEP Gateway Examination to graduate, provided they meet certain other requirements.

The legislation also provides that the case conference committee determines eligibility for graduation of certain students with disabilities. The act also provides that all students in Grade 10 must take the examination.

Educational Standards -- A roundtable has been created to develop educational standards for Indiana students. Standards would be set for each grade level, easily comparable to national and international standards, written in an easy-to-understand manner, and distributed to students and parents.



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Consumer protection bills passed

Integrated public safety commission -- I authored House Enrolled Act 1869, which establishes the integrated public safety commission to promote the efficient use of local, state and federal public safety agency resources through improved coordination and cooperation.

Stopping “slamming” & “cramming” -- House Enrolled Act 1628 gives the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission (IURC) authority to impose a civil penalty on a telecommunications provider if the provider has violated the law or rules prohibiting the unauthorized switching of telecommunications providers or the billing of unauthorized services -- known as "slamming" and "cramming."

"Slamming" is the term used to describe the telecommunications practice of changing a person's phone service provider without the customer's permission. "Cramming," on the other hand, refers to billing for services not authorized by the customer.

Telephone solicitation -- House Enrolled Act 1434 imposes stricter regulations on professional solicitors and fundraisers while protecting telephone customers.

The act requires a professional solicitor to disclose several items to the attorney general, including the portion of a contribution that goes

to the solicitor and the portion that actually goes to the charity.

It also requires professional solicitors to disclose many of those items at the beginning of each call, including the name of the company and the phone number and address of the location from which the call is being made.

HMOs -- House Enrolled Act 1309 establishes an external procedure for grievances against HMOs. The act requires the Indiana Department of Insurance to hear grievances filed by individuals who have been denied services by an HMO.

The review would allow a physician who specializes in the treatment in question rather than a general practitioner or other physician to determine whether the patient should receive the requested services. Furthermore, the bill has provisions to ensure the review is done in a timely fashion. In life-threatening cases, the review will take place within five days.

This act provides a less costly and less time-consuming procedure for HMO grievance review. The independent reviews would be paid for by HMOs except for a \$25 filing fee paid for by the consumer.